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FAYETTE COUNTY ACQUIRES U.S. ARMY RESERVE CENTER

Uniontown, PA – After more than two years of planning, Fayette County has officially acquired the Federal Army Reserve Center.

Located at 245 McClellandtown Road in Uniontown, the reserve center sat vacant for nearly a decade before Fayette County Commissioners Vincent Vicites, Dave Lohr and Angela Zimmerlink received the property deed last week.

“When we started this endeavor in April of 2016, we were looking at all the options for potential prison sites close to our current court system,” Vicites said. “When we learned the center was available, with its acreage and no additional buildings to tear down, we knew we wanted to make application to the General Services Administration.”

The U.S. General Services Administration provides centralized procurement for government agencies, with a mission of delivering value and savings in real estate, technology, acquisition and other mission-support services.

Commissioners acquired the property, which comprises more than six acres and 15,000 square feet of buildings, at no cost from the U.S. Army through the GSA’s Federal Surplus Property Public Conveyance Program.

Earlier this year, Lohr and Vicites met with U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pennsylvania; U.S. Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pennsylvania; and U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pennsylvania; in Washington D.C. to garner support for their application.

Additionally, the county previously purchased another vacant one-acre property adjacent to the reserve center, in the hopes of increasing Fayette’s acquisition chances.

“We did everything we could to make sure we positioned ourselves to get the property,” Vicites said. “It’s been a long, rigorous process, but we knew if we were able to obtain it, we’d be getting \$3 or \$4 million worth of property with fully infrastructured buildings and land for \$0.



“In the end, it’s well worth it because it ultimately saves taxpayers money.”

Originally built in 1956 as office and classroom space, commissioners hope the reserve center will someday alleviate problems with the current 130-year-old county jail, Vicites said.

“We now have to take it to the next level and that next step is to develop the plan to solve our prison problem and implement it,” he said. “We’re trying to both utilize a property that’s been dormant for 10 years and approach it in a cost-effective manner.”

Zimmerlink said she’s glad everything is coming to fruition after her previous attempts to garner support in pursuing the reserve center were unsuccessful.

“Acquiring this property was one of the first items I brought to the attention of fellow commissioners in 2016 knowing the benefits of such a site,” Zimmerlink said. “If (we have) open discussion on its future use and the manner in which we use tax dollars wisely, this acquisition can and will benefit Fayette County.”

Lohr said the free property will be “a savings to the county’s budget” and allow commissioners to both “bring the county jail up to date” and provide staff and prisoners “a much safer place to be.”

“The cost to operate a new jail which has everything mandated by the state Department of Corrections will be much easier on us,” Lohr said.

Vicites said the facility’s close proximity to the court system will also cut transportation costs. Commissioners have also already conducted a prison population assessment that will net significant savings when the new facility is finished.

“This facility is crucial for Fayette County’s future,” Vicites said.

Lohr said commissioners plan to address overcrowding, separation of inmates based on crime severity, juvenile imprisonment and housing of inmates with mental health disorders when designing the new facility.

Once up and running, Lohr said, he hopes to offer GED, dog training and educational programs that will “give the inmates the opportunity to have something to work for.”

Lohr said modeling such programs after those currently offered at SCI Fayette, can give inmates the tools to return to society and change their lives.

“Starting with a new building gives us choices that we can work with,” Lohr said. “We can make this a positive event for the county for decades to come if we do it right - which we will.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettcountypa.info.



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